



The Architecture



When compared with rural Chinese architecture, Two Dragon architecture looks like basic Chinese peasant architecture. This may seem an obvious conclusion. However, previous studies determined that Chinese sojourners mimicked European and American architectural styles, not their own styles. This conclusion creates a historical "mold" that Two Dragon contradicts.

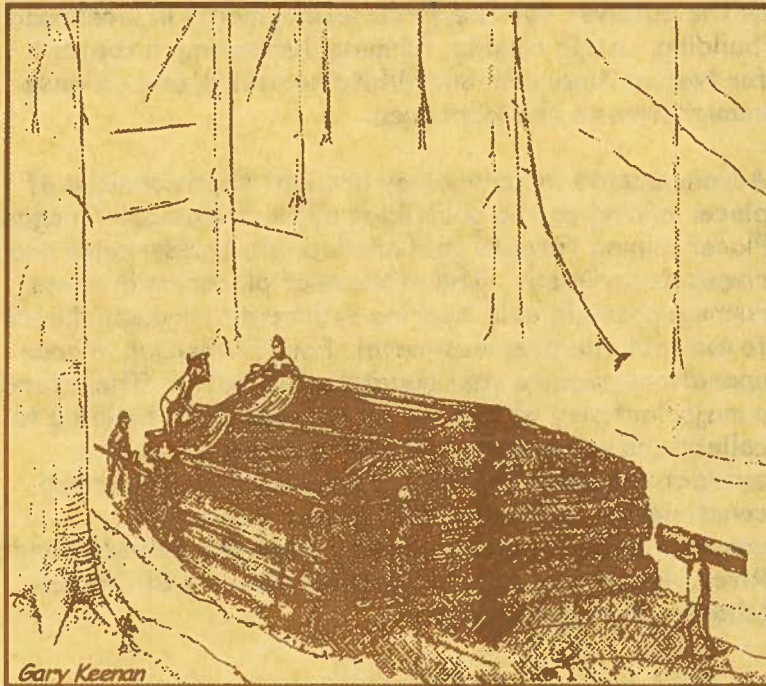
Why doesn't Two Dragon fit the historical mold? It could be that Two Dragon was a unique situation. For example, the nearest period Anglo-American settlement was over three miles and one-thousand feet below Two Dragon. Excavation suggests that Two Dragon was inhabited solely by Chinese workers. Most Chinese sojourners lived within Anglo-American communities. The Chinese workers would be isolated from the pressures and tensions of contact with the Anglo-Americans. This distance may have allowed them to build what they knew, instead of what they were told to build by the Anglo-Americans. Since there is no mention of Two Dragon Camp in historical records, it is likely that the Chinese builders were mostly autonomous in their day-to-day activities.

However, accurate data about Chinese peasant architecture only became available to Western scholars in 1986, and many sojourner studies were carried out prior to this date. This suggests that pre-1986 studies of Chinese sojourner architecture may be inaccurate. So, Two Dragon may not be as historically unique as it seems today.

Two Dragon Camp presents us with a rare look into the life and conditions of the 19th century Chinese sojourner in Northeastern Oregon. The isolated location of the camp away from ethnic tensions may have allowed the Chinese to express cultural traditions they were unable to elsewhere. Making an effort to understand the relationship between Two Dragon and other Chinese sites is the next step in our goal of bringing back to life the voice of the long-silent Chinese sojourner.



For a copy of the
Two Dragon Camp site report contact:
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Artist's reconstruction of a cabin type structure at Two Dragon Camp

Information contained within extracted from the Two Dragon Site report by George Mead; and from *The Guests on Gold Mountain: Chinese Vernacular Architecture and Two Dragon Camp* by Danielle D. Myers. Artist's reconstructions by Gary Keenan. Photos, text and layout by Danielle D. Myers.

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The Guests of Gold Mountain



View to the northwest in vicinity of Two Dragon Camp

The Chinese of Two Dragon Camp



The Gum San Hock



The late 19th century in the American West brought a booming economy that created more jobs than the American populace could provide. Facing famine, poverty and civil war, male Chinese peasants followed rumors of wealth and opportunity to California, Oregon, Washington and British Columbia. They called themselves "Gum San Hock," Cantonese for "Guests of Gold Mountain."

The Chinese were given the most dangerous jobs in mines and on railroad crews. They would take jobs that Americans and Europeans saw as beneath them, such as washing laundry or cooking. Though they were paid far less than an average American worker, their earnings outstripped that of average Chinese peasants. They faced exploitation, racism, and laws that prevented them from owning land, or becoming American citizens. They were called "coolie," and "Chinaman," and their presence was referred to as the "yellow plague." Many innocents were beaten, and sometimes murdered for being Chinese.

Most mass migrations of people are made with the intent to establish new homes and new lives. The Chinese migration to the Western United States was different than most. These peasants left China with intent to work, save money and return to their homeland. Most did not seek to establish new homes and new lives on Gold Mountain. The term "sojourner" is commonly used to describe such migrants. As sojourners, the Chinese had little reason to change their living habits, traditional cultural customs, or their worldview. This attitude may have added to the hostilities American people were developing toward the Chinese migrants.

The contribution of the Chinese people to the building of the United States has been ignored for decades. Though their voices have been silenced by racism and ignorance, the story of the Chinese sojourners can still be heard where time has preserved it.



The Chinese In Oregon



Northeastern Oregon's Union County was a central region for the gold rush. Historic mining in the La Grande area began in 1864 at Tanner Gulch; located in the upper reaches of the Grand Ronde river. Small panning expeditions quickly developed into a vast placer mining operation. Today, this historic mining operation is called Carson Camp. Gold mining has been identified as the catalyst for the first developments in local road building, cattle raising, farming, lumbering, a context for Native American and White relations, and Chinese immigration to the local area.

Advancements in technology brought the technique of placer mining to the goldfields of Northeastern Oregon. Placer mining targets gold eroded into the streams and rivers as sediment. The process of placering involves running possible gold bearing sediments through sluices to extract the precious metal. For this reason, placer operations require vast quantities of water. Therefore, a major activity of the placer era was ditch building to collect and carry water to where it was needed to extract the gold. By 1867, a sizable ditch was under construction, indicating that placer activity of considerable size was underway along the Grande Ronde River. Historical records mention the role of Chinese laborers in this operation:

In 1867, a group of Chinese who were working the mine, conceived the idea of bringing water from Anthony Creek, between Mud and Anthony Lakes, and convey it to the Grande Ronde watershed to the location of the mine which was on the hill above a water supply. The long ditch [site 7-36-00/1], was completed by the Chinamen after fearful hardship. They carried their supplies up the hill in the most primitive way, with their load balanced on each end of a stick across their shoulders. After their canal had been built, farmers in the North Powder water shed refused to let them divert their irrigation water and their ditch was useless (Quoted from the Two Dragon Site Report, 3-3)



Two Dragon Camp



Two Dragon Camp, or National Forest Service archaeological site 6-23-27/1, was found in 1978 by a timber survey crew in the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest. Excavation began in 1991, led by Dr. George Mead of the La Grande Ranger District and Gary Keenan of La Grande High School.



PIT field crew member standing in placer ditch near Two Dragon Camp. The Chinese probably cut through the boulder with hand tools.

Excavation is funded and supervised through the U.S. Forest Service Passport in Time (or PIT) program.

Two Dragon was a temporary camp built by Chinese laborers working on the placer ditch system. The camp is located just below 6000 feet, at a critical point in the placer ditch system.

The structures at Two Dragon are well preserved and undisturbed since their abandonment in the mid to late 1870's.

Over twenty-eight structures have been identified, and approximately twenty have been excavated as of the 1998 field season. Further field seasons have been planned through the PIT program until the year 2000.

